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SIPDIS

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TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU PREL KPAO
SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

In Today's Papers

Erdogan-Assad Meet in Istanbul
Media outlets report that on Wednesday's meeting between Prime Minister Erdogan and visiting Syrian Head of State, Bashar Assad, came together in Istanbul. All media report that Turkey and Syria have agreed to remove visa requirements between the two countries; tractor-trailers will be exempt from taxes, and a council of ministers meeting will be held once a year under the leadership of Turkish and Syrian prime ministers. Media also report that Foreign Minister Davutoglu on Thursday will bring together the Iraqi and Syrian foreign ministers in an effort to help relieve the tensions between the two countries over bombings in Baghdad earlier this month that Iraq claims was instigated by Syria. The meeting will be held with the participation of Turkish, Syrian, Iraqi and Arab League representatives. Mainstream Hurriyet says Turkey will suggest the establishment of a three-side border security mechanism. The meeting will correspond with Thursday's Turkey-Iraq Strategic Cooperation Council meeting on economic integration.

Atalay: Cross Border Extensions and New Letters for the Turkish Alphabet
Media outlets report that following a meeting on Wednesday with Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin, Interior Minister Besir Atalay told the press that the Council of Ministers would be discussing renewing the motion authorizing the Turkish military to carry out cross-border incursions into northern Iraq -- but has yet to do so. Atalay stressed that not renewing the extension has never been discussed by the government. In denying widespread media speculation that the government would not seek an extension as part of its democratic initiative on Kurdish issues, Besir said that "the press is creating scenarios, we haven't finalized any of the efforts contained in the democratic initiative and (this issue) wasn't on the agenda. When the time comes, we will evaluate at the Council." (Sabah)

Atalay also rejected Wednesday's media reports that there were plans to add new letters, Q, W and X, to the Turkish alphabet. The opposition has harshly criticized the alleged move. Hakki Suha Okay, deputy parliamentary group leader of the CHP, told reporters, "According to our Constitution and existing laws, it's impossible to

include such letters in the alphabet." MHP's Oktay Vural said, "This is betrayal, and an attempt to erode Turkish."

Cicek: PKK Militants Won't be Penalized If They Surrender
Mainstream Milliyet reports deputy PM Cemil Cicek has signaled that the PKK terrorists in Kandil Mountains would be given no penalties if they surrender to Turkish security forces. "At least 1,500 of the 4,500 militants in the mountains are not Turkish nationals. A great majority of the rest are fit to take advantage of article 221 of the Penal Code if they return to Turkey," said Cicek. Cicek noted militants who have not committed any murders are released in line with article 221. Cicek added most of the PKK militants have not committed any crimes, except for participation in a terror organization.

Baykal Reluctant to Discuss Turkey's 'Kurdish Initiative' with Talabani

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that in October, CHP leader Deniz Baykal is expected to pay a visit to Iraq and meet with President Talabani. Talabani wants to tell Baykal his views about the Turkish government's Kurdish "democratic initiative," but the CHP is reluctant to discuss the issue, saying that the Kurdish question is Turkey's "internal problem." Baykal will reportedly not go to Iraq if Iraqi officials do not accept to not raise this sensitive issue, according to Zaman.

Editorial Commentary on Kurdish Initiative

Okay Gonensin wrote in mainstream Vatan: "Serious mind confusion continues as far as the government's initiative is concerned. The

ANKARA 00001367 002 OF 004

government seemed determined about the idea even though content was never made to public. The later content is revealed, the worse the mind confusion will be. The only success story for this initiative requires if the ruling AKP can formulate this as an effort for most progressive rights for all citizens of Turkey."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal Radikal: "The government is working on two parallel levels by focusing on democratic steps to take while not avoiding fight against PKK at the same time. Turkey, in this regard, is waiting for even more cooperation from the U.S. regarding efforts to eliminate PKK presence in northern Iraq. Interior Minister Atalay was denying some reports in the press that Turkey will not seek for renewal of cross border operation mandate as well as denying plans regarding some more letters to be added in Turkish alphabet. On the other hand, there will be some other tangible steps about the democratic process may be coming out from PM Erdogan after his trip to the U.S."

Babacan Announces Medium-Term Economic Program

Media outlets report State Minister Ali Babacan has announced the ruling government's medium-term economic program in Ankara, emphasizing that from now on, talks with the IMF will proceed based on this program. Babacan said Turkey doesn't need the fund's cash and hasn't included it in fiscal projections. The program made public by Babacan projects 6 percent contraction in 2009, and 3.5 percent growth in 2010. Turkey's economy contracted 7 percent in the second quarter of the year after slumping 14.3 percent in the first three months. The 2009 budget deficit is expected to stand at TL 66 billion by the year's end. Unemployment is estimated as 14.8 percent, and no tax hikes were foreseen.

According to Islamist-oriented Zaman, the program indicates that the government will proceed without seeking a new deal with the IMF. Business daily Referans, however, stresses that the success of the program depended on making a new deal with the IMF. A commentary in Referans says that the government hardly could reach the target of 3.5 percent growth in 2010 without IMF funds. Mainstream Aksam reports Babacan as saying that talks with the IMF were advancing smoothly and that the parties were "close to a deal."

Zaman Interviews Professor Phillips

In an unusual twist, Islamist-oriented Zaman and Today's Zaman both carry a full-page interview with Professor David Phillips, the author of the Atlantic Council's "Confidence Building Between Turks

and Iraqi Kurds" report. In addition to his views on the Turkish government's Kurdish initiative, Phillips commented extensively on Armenia-Turkish rapprochement noting that "compromise between the Turks and Armenians will be a long process which requires lots of contacts." Phillips said that "Turks and Armenians will come together when the border is opened, and it will deepen mutual understandings. This, however, doesn't mean that Armenians will abandon their claims of 'genocide.'" In addition, he noted that "the Minsk process is expected to be finalized with an agreement which will return the majority of territories affected by war to Azerbaijan. There is, however, no connection between a settlement between Turkey and Armenia and Azerbaijani lands. I believe the normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations will support a great extent the talks on Nagorno Karabakh."

Barroso Will Be a Balancing Factor for Turkey (Sabah)
All papers report on the European Parliament's election of Jose Manuel Barroso for a second five year term as president of the European Commission. Mainstream Hurriyet headlines, "EU: Continue with Barroso," and reports, "Jose Manuel Barroso got the EU top job with the support of 382 votes to 219 against, from among the 718 lawmakers." Mainstream Sabah writes, "Barroso Will Be A Balancing Factor for Turkey," as saying, "Barroso will balance Christian Democrats who are divided against Turkey's membership." Islamist-oriented Zaman headlines, "Barroso Who Supported Turkey is At It for Five More Years," reporting, "Despite French leader Sarkozy and German leader Merkel, EU Commission chief who didn't

ANKARA 00001367 003 OF 004

hesitate to support Turkey's accession, is elected again." Meanwhile, leftist Taraf writes in, "The Left Couldn't Defeat Barroso," that, "the European Parliament gave Barroso, who takes nationalism and racism as threat, one more term presidency despite the opposition of liberal and socialist groups." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "European Right Wins One More Time."

Editorial Comment on Iran and 5+1; Turkey's Potential Patriot Missile Purchase

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The restart of nuclear talks with Iran gives hope for establishing regional stability and at the same time, rises Turkey's profile to interact. Given post-election events in Iran, the Mullah regime feels more pressured more than ever before both coming from outside and inside. Turkey on the other hand is presenting an inspiration to Iran with its secular and democratic structure. The days of Iran were exporting its ideology in the 80s are well over. And also countries in the region, not only Western powers, are very displeased by the ongoing instability caused by Iran. All of these factors are leading Iran to work for reconciliation and being more stable."

Hadi Uluengin wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "The debate over missile purchase should be on the need for open and free discussion. Turkish armament needs and upgrade of military systems, including purchase of Patriots or others, should be an extensive discussion by civilians not by military. In addition to that, Turkey has to focus on its urgent need for professional army as well."

Fehmi Koru wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "It will be a mistake to present our border neighbor Iran as a direct threat to Turkey. Turkey and Iran are having a good cooperation and dialogue while Ankara is already working on Tehran regarding to address nuclear issues. Purchasing missiles and treating Iran as a threat to Turkey only helps for disqualifying all possible peaceful ways to deal with the problems."

TV News (CNN Turk) Domestic

Q The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in a letter to Foreign Minister Davutoglu, expressed concern for the heavy tax fine imposed on the Dogan Media Group (DMG).

Q On Thursday, Prime Minister Erdogan will host an Iftar fast-breaking dinner for the chief editors of newspapers and TV channels.

Q Pro-Kurdish DTP MP Hamit Geylani describes army chief General

Ilker Basbug, CHP leader Deniz Baykal and MHP leader Devlet Bahceli as "three menaces" for Turkey and denounces their opposition to the ruling government's Kurdish democratic move.

Q Six al-Qaeda members are arrested for involvement in bomb attacks in Istanbul in November 2003.

Q The foreign ministers of Turkey, Iraq and Syria and Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa are expected to meet in Istanbul to discuss the tensions between Baghdad and Damascus over bomb attacks in Iraq earlier this month.

Q President Gul will visit Saudi Arabia from September 20-24.

World

Q Prime Minister Erdogan will visit the US from September 21-26 to join UN General Assembly meetings in New York and the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh.

Q Iran builds a wall at "strategic points" along its border with Turkey to prevent smuggling and the infiltrations of PJAK terrorists.

Q Afghan President Hamid Karzai reportedly secured over 54 percent of the votes in last month's presidential election.

Q European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso has won a second term of office in a vote at the European Parliament.

Q The Obama administration sets objectives for countering al-Qaeda

ANKARA 00001367 004 OF 004

in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Q Al-Qaeda has called on the Taliban to kidnap more foreign civilians in Afghanistan so they can be used in prisoner swap deals.

JEFFREY